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# DEPARTMENT OF VISITING NURSING AND SOCIAL WELFARE

IN CHARGE OF

EDNA L. FOLEY, R.N.

## ITEMS

MASSACHUSETTS. The last annual report of the Fall River District Association, Eugelia L. Eddy (Children's Hospital, Boston), superintendent, reports a staff of ten nurses and close coöperation with all the civic agencies in the city. One innovation was that the civic department of the Woman's Club, which in 1913 supported milk stations in the congested districts, agreed to make the study of the home conditions of the babies, in order to determine, if possible, the real reason for the death rate among babies in Fall River. The enormous consumption of condensed milk in the town was naturally supposed to be probably the chief cause for this infant mortality. The superintendent's report of this investigation is so interesting that nurses engaged in infant welfare work in other cities had better send for it, as there is room here for but one or two quotations from it.

The reports of all registered births were sent to the office of the District Nursing Association; each nurse kept a list of all babies born in her district, and as soon as possible, she made a visit of investigation to each one. If the home conditions were such that the baby was likely to be properly cared for, other visits were not made until the baby was three months old, the period of time decided upon to compute our statistics. Surroundings being other than favorable for the baby, because of ignorance or indifference on the part of the mother, every effort was made to see that the baby had its chance. The most startling condition revealed by our study was that 52 per cent of these babies who died did not survive a week; so that the matter of feeding resolved itself to 48 per cent of the deaths. A careful study of these individual cases but emphasized the fact that milk had little to do with the causes of death. Many other important conclusions were drawn, but that special instruction and care are needed, before and at the time of the arrival of the baby, seemed a self-evident fact. To meet this need an effort is being made by the nurses to visit expectant mothers regularly, to teach them personal hygiene; to prepare clothing for the baby and the necessities for the time of confinement; the Union Hospital has opened a clinic where these women may be examined and instructed by a competent physician and incidentally they are urged to select a doctor, if they have previously had a midwife for the actual confinement. Of the 179 visited, several women have been discovered who needed hospital treatment. This they received, thereby helping perhaps to decrease by a few that 38.6 per cent of deaths of infants who did not

live even ten hours after birth. This work is so new that we have no figures to prove its worth, though by another year we hope to show that the start is in the right direction. The nurses' visits of instruction and advice before confinement later become nursing calls, when mother and baby receive daily attention. This care before and after the baby is born is free only to those who cannot give in return some remuneration; all are expected to pay what their finances will warrant. The nurses have cared for over 400 mothers with their new babies. Many have been taught to bathe, feed and dress their babies according to rules which even English-speaking women seem never to have heard. One Portuguese mother, though she speaks little English herself, is very anxious to bring up her baby a real American; she attends the baby clinic weekly, follows directions, and appears extremely proud of an unusually bright, healthy little one. It is the custom among many of the Polish people to wrap their infants in cloth, in a fashion similar to the Italian swaddling clothes. Through the kindness of the sewing societies of the different churches, we have a plentiful supply of model infant garments which we used as samples and in cases of emergency. In one Polish family, where these garments were given, a man boarder was so pleased to see the baby in American clothes that he wished to send a set to his wife, who was in the old country. Further opportunity is offered these people for the care of their little ones at the six baby clinics with doctor and nurse in attendance, held in the different parts of the city; one each day of the week except Sunday. The attendance at these clinics during the year has been 1,041. In the summer months, the Seaside Home is always ready to receive the sick ones who need some special treatment which it is impossible for the mother to give at home.

Beside the babies who are visited at the day of birth, 1858 others reported by the Board of Health have received friendly calls. Many more are found in the homes visited for other purposes, but the baby is never overlooked. It is very rare that these calls are not received in the spirit in which they are made; in fact, they are often anticipated. We are not always successful in having advice followed. If the life of the baby or child seems endangered because of the indifference or neglect which, alas, at times is found, our friend from the S. P. C. C., with a few emphatic words, wonderfully helps our cause. He has helped us with more than twenty little ones, babies and children. It is unfortunate that his time in this city is so limited, two days in the week being far from adequate. We so often need him when he is not here.

Children poorly clad and fed, in immoral and unhealthy surroundings, have been found in following the reports of the medical inspectors of the schools. Over 1500 children have been visited in their homes and their parents or caretakers interviewed in regard to physical defects reported by the "school doctor." That the sending of the school cards to the homes is of inestimable value to the children is demonstrated over and over. One mother said, "I am real glad they sent that card from the school. I hadn't really noticed how white my little girl was getting, but then I saw that she didn't always eat her breakfast and didn't take time enough for dinner and supper, but I watch her now and make her eat and she looks a lot better." Another mother's child received a card for enlarged tonsils and adenoids. She said, "I'd be glad to have her throat fixed, she's always having colds or something the matter with her; but I can't afford to have it done." The child was referred to the throat clinic of the Union Hospital, examined, and a few days later the operation performed. The mother could afford the hospital charges and she paid them. The child as her mother says, is

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"picking up every day and looks lots better." Many parents are unintentionally neglectful and gladly follow the suggestions which the school card gives them. With the majority of these children we would be powerless to help but for the assistance of the out-patient department of the Union Hospital, the Fall River Dental Clinic, the City Dispensary, and the generosity of our interested friends among the doctors. By means of these, teeth have been extracted and filled; tonsils and adenoids removed; tonics given; sores on faces and bodies healed; etc. Because of kindly and sometimes stern suggestions on the part of the nurse, many of the children go to school with cleaner heads, clothes, and bodies, much to the satisfaction of the teachers, some of whom have kindly told us so.

In addition to the work among babies and children, the nurses have cared for all other types of cases. Over 1800 of the patients were in families known to one or the other of 35 corporations which contribute to the support of the District Nursing Association. Fees are collected whenever families can afford to pay them, as the report says:

That the district nurse is not a charity nurse, seems difficult for some to understand. She is for those of wealth, of moderate means, of no means. She is for any who need for their sick, in coöperation with the doctor, the services of a trained, graduate nurse.

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NEW JERSEY. The Public Health Committee of the New Jersey State Nurses' Association is being organized and is endeavoring to call into its membership all visiting nurses within the state. The requirements for membership are experience in visiting nursing and individual membership in the State Association, the member paying no additional dues to the section. The expenses of the section are to be covered by an appropriation made for it twice a year by the State Association. It is anticipated that at each annual and semi-annual meeting of the State Association, one hour will be given over to the section for its program. Other meetings of the section will be held independently. At a general meeting of public health nurses held May 22 at Newark, a most interesting and instructive talk with practical demonstrations was given on Little Mothers' Leagues by Mrs. Louise Pasquay, of the New York City Health Department. An effort is being made to provide for the members who wish them, copies of the outline of lessons as used by the school nurses in these leagues in New York.